

The Path Towards a Great Future in Education: Self Advocacy



By Stephen Hinkle
Self Advocate

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My Background



- Have Autism (Asperger Syndrome)
- Grew up in the Special Ed System
- Was in Segregated Classes till 4th Grade
- Inclusion from 5th grade till college
- Graduated College – BA in Computer Science from San Diego State University
- Obtained my masters from Northern Arizona University – going for a masters in Disability Policy Studies
- National Speaker for 13 years and have presented in 17 states

What is “Special” about “Special Education”?



- “Special Education” is a term that refers to **people with special needs getting educated.**

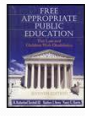
- Special Education sometimes allows people to receive **additional supports or services** that others may not receive due to their special needs.

- Some Common Supports:

- Test Accommodations
- Curriculum Changes
- Additional Therapies such as speech, OT, PT, social etc
- Use of “assistive technologies”
- Communication in a different way if a person cannot speak or write
- Adaptive PE
- Transportation Supports
- Extended School Year



What is a Special Education Student Entitled to?



- A Free and Appropriate Public Education
- Access to the General Education Curriculum
- Early Childhood Supports
- Individualized Education Program (IEP)
- Appropriate Supports and Services
- Be Taught in the "Least Restrictive Environment"
- Supports for transition to adulthood until one graduates high school or reaches age 21 (whichever comes first)

What is Inclusion?



- Being in the regular classroom like all the other kids (as opposed to a segregated class)
- IEP Goals and supports accommodated in the regular classroom
- Supports and Services (tests, OT, PT, Speech, Social Skills, curriculum modifications, assistive technology, with little or no pull out)
- Have access to school related extracurricular activities

Promoting Inclusive Disability Culture in School: What People Can Do to change the outcomes



Historic Treatment of People with Special Needs



- Years ago, **locking people with disabilities in institutions** their entire life was very common
- Many were sent to **segregated schools** where they were given inferior treatment
- Treated as **"barbaric"**
- Even today, there are many students with special needs in **segregated classes**

Some Sad Statistics I must Share



- The **unemployment rate for people with disabilities is over 73%** according to the organization TASH in 2009.
- More than half of people with disabilities **do not have High School Diplomas that actually count for anything**, like college admission or job placement.
- Many people with disabilities live at a **poverty level or lower**.

Beginning to Advocate for Yourself



• Get to know yourself

- What are your **Strengths**?
- What are your **Interests**?
- What are your **Hobbies**?
- What are your **Personal Needs**?
- What are your **Academic Needs**?
- What are your **Social Needs**?
- What are your **Support Needs**?
- Where do you **fit into the community**?
- What **else is important to you**?
- Where do you **want to be in the next 5 or 10 years**?
- Which things could I **do better or improve on**?
- What **bothers me** and **what could I change**?
- Am I enjoying a **quality life**?

Self Evaluation of your Academic Environment



- Do you believe you are **achieving and learning the content**?
- Are you **achieving your IEP goals**?
- Are you making **adequate academic progress**?
- Are you **comfortable or uncomfortable** while in school?
- What are you **good at** and what could you use some improvement on?

Self Evaluation of your social needs in School



- Are you making adequate **social progress**:
 - Are you **making friends** easily?
 - Are you able to **maintain social relationships**?
 - Do you understand the **skills** to do the various **social activities** such as:
 - School Spirit Activities
 - Recess / PE
 - Lunchtime Fun
 - Assemblies
 - Plays
 - Concerts
 - Sports
 - After School Programs
 - VAPA Programs
 - Dances
 - Etc
- Are there any social skills from the **recreation and/or etiquette** realms that you could use improvement on?

Self Evaluating Your Support Team



- Do you think they are **doing their job well**?
- Are you in your **comfort zone** when working with them most of the time?
- Is there anything that **bothers you about their services and the way they are delivered**?
- Do you find that the **services they are delivering are beneficial to your learning** and why or why not?
- **Support teams can include:**
 - Teachers
 - Parents
 - Therapists (e.g. OT, PT, Speech, Adaptive PE, etc)
 - School Admin Staff
 - Outside Agencies
 - Friends
 - Others

Giving Feedback to your support team



- ☒ Excellent
- ☐ Very good
- ☐ Good
- ☐ Average
- ☐ Poor

- What **feedback** do you want to give the team supporting you on what they are doing well for you?
- What do your **friends think of your progress** in school or have to say about you?
- What else could your **support team do better?**
- Is there any policies or supports that are **hindering** your progress and/or causing **learned helplessness** for you?

Transition Planning



- Transition is a plan for a person with special needs to begin their life after they **exit high school**. These can include things such as:

- College
- Independent Living Skills
- Job Skills
- Job Training
- Adult Social Life Activities
- Bus Access
- Driver Education
- Raising a Family
- And Much More!

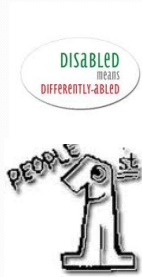
- **At age 16**, life after high school transition planning **must begin**. (It can begin earlier if a member of the IEP team requests)

Transition Planning



- This can involve other agencies such as **Dept of Economic Security**, colleges, **Social Security** and others
- There are **many tracks** you can choose to take depending on your needs:
 - Graduate with your HS class at age 18 (typically the **academic track**)
 - Take **extra years of High school** if you need them up to age 21 (usually for **functional skills** and/or **academics** at a slower pace)
 - Do your age 18-21 years in **another setting** such as a **university**, and/or **work training setting** (e.g. not on the HS campus).
- Depending on the **path(s)** you choose, it will affect your potential funding sources, service availability, career path potential, and more.

Disabled or "Differently Abled"?



- When referring to someone with special needs, **call them by name** and treat them with **respect**.
- **Never** call anyone "retarded" or make jokes about ones disability
- Recognize ones **strengths**, not ones deficits first. This treats one as welcoming
- Use "**Person First language**" rather than disability first language

Alternative Communication Etiquette



- When someone uses an **alternative communication system**, learn how to understand it and even sometimes respond back using it.
- Sometimes people with special needs will take **longer to respond** and the **answers given may be simpler**.
- When interacting or doing certain activities, one may have to **adapt what they are doing** to accommodate a person who may have movement differences or a different brain functioning level.

More Disability Etiquette



- Seeing eye dogs and monkey helpers should **never be petted or touched** without permission
- When one uses a wheelchair, **do not push it** unless the person asks you to. Opening doors for those in wheelchairs is a kind thing to do for them though.
- Aides and Paraprofessionals are an exception to the "**Don't go near the kid when an adult is there rule!**"

Evaluate the Culture of Disability in Your School



WILL I BE
ABLE TO
GET TO
ALL THE
PLACES IN
MY SCHOOL
THAT
MY NON-
DISABLED
FRIENDS
LOVE?



Evaluate the Culture of Disability in School



Or



- Are people with special needs **included or segregated** in academic classes in your school?
- Where are "special education rooms" located in your school?
- Are supports delivered in the **regular classrooms** or in separate rooms?
- Are people with special needs included in **extracurricular** and **school spirit** activities?

Cultural Evaluation Continued



- Are students with special needs able to **achieve their potential** and excel in the school?
- How much **access** do kids with special needs have access to the **general education curriculum**?

Disability Etiquette in School



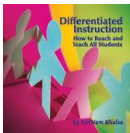
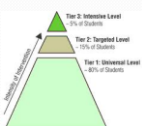
- How is your schools general knowledge of **disability etiquette** among the students and how well is it **practiced by students and staff** in the classrooms, hallways, cafeterias, etc?
- Are the **students who have special needs** well respected citizens in your school?

Support Workers, Friendship, and Isolationism



- Students need to know that is OK to **go near** someone **with an aide or paraprofessional** near them.
- Kids that don't **know this exception** often leads to people with aides **not having any friends!**
- It is very important to recognize **"inclusion"** from **"an island in the mainstream"**

Academic Curriculum and the Disability Culture



- Some people who receive special education services may need **assignments and/or tests modified** to meet their needs, such as:
 - Easier questions
 - Less numbers of questions
 - Tests showing picture based questions
 - Alternative questions that align with a child's IEP goals
- Note: in many cases it is possible to accomplish this with **little or no change to the subject** that is being taught that day!
- Is **modified instruction** being provided in your school to **the kids that need it** and are other kids accepting and treating the kids that receive it as welcomed members of their class?

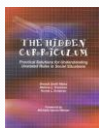
Are Kids With Disabilities Involved In All Areas of the Curriculum?



- Core Subjects:
 - English
 - Language Arts
 - Math
 - Science
 - History
 - Social Studies
- Electives:
 - PE
 - VAPA
 - Home Economics
 - Industrial Arts
 - Career Tech Ed
 - Computers
 - And Many Others

- It is important that every child with special needs gets a **well rounded education that interests them**.
- To accomplish this, people with special needs need to be included in **as many subjects as possible**.
- The **"core" subjects** are usually the most critical when it comes to IEPs and standards but **all are important**.
- It is important that those with special needs have access to the **subjects in school they love** so they **have "fun" in school**.
- Lastly, it is best for supports and **services to be delivered in the classroom** as opposed to "pull out".

Extracurricular Activities and Disability Culture



- Is **direct instruction** in extracurricular and school spirit activities **being taught** to those that need it in your school?

Some people with special needs **may not learn the social activities** without being directly taught the **skills for how to do them**.

Common skills for extracurricular activities which some kids **may need to be taught** could include:

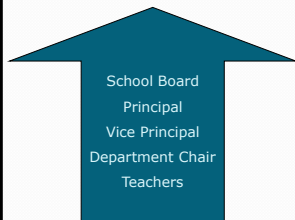
- Game Play Rules
- How to dance
- How to be a friend
- Protocols for interacting with others
- Audience Interaction Skills
- Manners and Etiquette
- Conversation Skills
- Meanings of Slang
- Banter
- etc

Adapting in the Extracurricular Realm



- Sometimes sports and recreational games may need to be adapted for people with special needs or movement differences
- Universal design makes all the activities accessible.

The Chain of Command



- There is a hierarchy in most schools in how the staff are organized and whom reports to whom
- When there is an issue with a policy that is not being resolved, sometimes it is best to go to the person higher up.

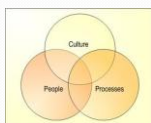
Addressing Disability Policy Issues In Your School



- Self Advocates have the **power to make big change!**
- Discuss ways in which the **policy could be changed** for the better!
- Present the issue in a **positive manner**
- Determine **which teams or groups of people** it would be best to approach with the proposed changes.



Change Happens Slowly



- Arrange **an appropriate meeting time** with the team
- **Don't expect changes overnight**, as sometimes you will run into resistance, budget concerns, legal issues, or other roadblocks.
- Change often **happens a little at a time**.



Don't be afraid to speak out!



- Sometimes **school discipline policies** make students **afraid of speaking out** for fear of discipline.
- If meeting times are **arranged** and you market the **change as positive**, you should not be disciplined.
- You should speak out to staff if the relationship between you and your support staff is not **productive and comfortable** for you
- Disability policy issues should be spoken to staff at **appropriate times**.

Addressing Various Teams



- **Inclusion / Segregation:**
 - Teachers
 - Principal
 - School Board
- **Accessibility of Rooms**
 - Physical Plant / Maintenance
- **Instructional / Curriculum:**
 - General Ed Teachers
 - Special Ed Teachers
 - Inclusion Facilitators
- **Culture / Disability Etiquette:**
 - Teachers
 - Peers
 - Support Staff
 - Principal

Addressing Various Teams, Continued



- **Student Supports / Comfort:**
 - Teachers
 - Aides / Paraprofessionals
 - Support Staff
- **Extracurricular:**
 - Teachers
 - VAPA Departments
 - PE Dept
 - ASB / Student Government
 - Extracurricular Staff
 - Peers
- **Assistive Technology:**
 - Teachers
 - Support Staff
 - Tech Support
- **Room Locations of Resource Rooms:**
 - Principal
 - Teachers

Leading your own IEP Meeting

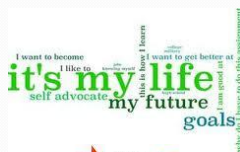


- **Choose your own team** (at minimum you must have at least one of each of the following at the meeting):

- General Ed Teacher
- Special Ed Teacher
- Parent
- Administrator / PEA Rep
- Individual to interpret Results

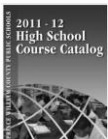
You can invite others to your IEP meeting such as **peers, advocates, specialists,** and others!

Leading your own IEP Meeting



- Set **goals for yourself**
- **Share your thoughts** for the next year of school in terms of **academic and social** issues
- Understand the **issues** your teachers and parents have to say about you
- Make **recommendations for your future** to your teachers and support staff

Student Led IEPs: Academics



- Help select the **curriculum** in terms of **core subjects and electives** you will receive

- Advocate for any **modifications** you will need to the **curriculum**

- Share with the IEP team your needs for **assistive technology**



Student Led IEPs: Extracurricular



- Share your **extracurricular needs** with the team and **set some extracurricular goals**.
- Tell the team which **activities you would like to participate in**.
- Explain to your team if you are **having trouble learning how to do an extracurricular activity** or want to learn more about a specific activity.

Student Led IEPs: Test Results



- Test results can reveal things you might be **good at** and other things you may **need to work on** later.
- Test results should be **taken with a grain of salt** and put into **context** with other known information about the student such as **his/her strengths, interests, and goals**.
- **Don't be offended by poor scores** or low age equivalency ratings on one or more tests. These again have to be **put into context** with other information about the student.
- All Tests can have **bias** in their results.

Student Led IEPs: Know your Legal Rights



- Various **laws exist** to protect the rights of people with special needs in access to **education, supports, and services**.
- If you are denied a service or **feel your rights have been violated**, you have the right to get a second opinion through the legal system via **mediation, arbitration, due process, and/or trial**.
- If you need to bring a legal case or mediation, **first research your rights** and then call an attorney.

Many With Special Needs Go on to Meaningful Lives After High School



- Community College
- 4-Year University
- Vocational / Technical College
- Graduate School
- Internships
- Employment
- Military Service
- Live on your Own
- Live with Roommates
- Live in College Housing (Dorms, Apts. etc)
- Relationships
- Marriage
- Adult Life Activities
- And many more!

What society can do to improve the outcomes of persons with disabilities



- Work to make services **focus on improving ones strengths**, not be based on ones deficits
- Work to end the "**culture of poverty**" among people with disabilities by creating services and allowing **collaboration between agencies** so that persons with disabilities can pursue **real career paths that pay a living wage and have a future.**



There is more society can do, too!



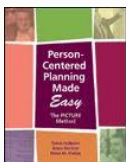
- Encourage your school staff to **update outdated support procedures** that lead poor outcomes and replace them with ones that lead to the best outcomes.
- Don't assume a person will be receiving supports for life, it is **possible that they will "outgrow" their supports** or need new ones as a person **becomes more independent.**

What Society can do as a whole to improve outcomes for persons with disabilities



- Advocate for **full compliance with all disability rights laws.**
- Give every child the opportunity to make and **complete the path from Preschool to Grad School.**
- Promote **Inclusion**
- Work to **raise the graduation rates** of high school and college students with disabilities
- Work to create a generation in which **parents do not have to bend over backwards** to get what they need for their child with a disability as it is very challenging for many parents in the current system.

Persons with Disabilities can chose their path in Life



- Break down "**Low Expectations Barriers**"
- End the **culture of poverty and unemployment** among people with disabilities
- Allow persons with disabilities to **choose their path in life**

What Society as a whole can do



- Provide support in assisting persons with disabilities who need to learn **social skills, manners, etiquette, and how to be friends.**
- Restore civility and **educate the public on disability etiquette** and treat persons with disabilities as **valued members of their community**
- When you meet someone with a disability, **be their true friend**
- Create a culture in which people with **special needs are welcomed.**

The most important of all



- BE THEIR ADVOCATE!!!!
- BE THEIR TRUE FRIEND!!!
- HELP OTHERS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS MAKE THE DECISIONS THAT WILL LEAD THEM TO A GOOD FUTURE AHEAD USING ALL THEIR TALENTS AND STRENGTHS!!!!!!

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